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FRIENDLY PERSUASION

AND

CHRISTIAN EXHORTATION.

To all, who profess the Guidance of the Spirit of Christ and Christianity, to keep out of false Reports, Whisperings, and Backbitings, which disturb the Peace of the Church, and are the Occasion of Offences.

OFTEN it hath been on my Heart the Consideration of the great Love of God who visited me in my tender youthful Days, for then was I earnestly seeking after the Knowledge of God, and Life Eternal, in solitary Places where I might be alone; there did I often mourn, cry, and travail in the Bitterness and Anguish of my Soul, till he appeared who gives Relief to the Oppressed and Needy: And blessed be the God of *Israel*, who took Pity of me in my distressed State, and did for the Cry of the Poor, and Sighing of the Needy, arise in an acceptable Day to give my Soul Relief from those Disquietings and Dissatisfactions I was then under, while I was amongst the Professors of God in that Day.

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Day: Now since God's blessed Day hath dawned, and his Arm of Salvation hath reach'd unto me, I can say it hath been a great Care upon my Spirit to keep to that sure Rock, Foundation, Habitation and quiet peaceable Dwelling, which he hath in some measure given me a Possession of, and an Inheritance in that Eternal Life that is with the Father Eternal, praise to his Name for ever.

Now Friends, the Intent of this Paper is earnestly to persuade all, who profess the Truth, to keep out of those very hurtful Evils of Strife, Debate and Division, that are too commonly aggravated and heightened, by letting in Jealousy, false Reports, Whispering and Backbiting. This I have seen with Grief of Spirit in the Light of the Lord, hath been the Means by which the Enemy, the evil Seed's-man, the Devil, the common Enemy of Man's temporal and eternal Good, hath wrought to break that sweet Unity and Heavenly Conversation amongst Brethren: The Apostle *Paul*, in *Rom. i. 29.* had a Sight of these Evils, and declares them as his Judgment, to be Tokens of a declining and reprobate Mind; when they did not like to retain God in their Knowledge, God gave them up to a reprobate Mind to do those Things which are not convenient, being filled with *Envy, Murder, Debate, Deceit, Malignity, Whispering and Backbiting.*

1st. Whispering, Backbiting, Intermeddling with what do not concern them, and false Reports

ports are the common Enemies of civil and spiritual Society; it hath a secret and close Way of smiting in the Dark, and goes about from one to another, and privately vents its Slander, not with an Intent to make it less publick: It's a malicious Enemy, this Way the Whisperer hath to deliver false Reports, that thereby he may make them the more believed and spoken of too, for that Person that receives a false Report as a Secret from one, thinks to please some Body else by delivering it as a Secret to others also; so it passes from one to another, 'till at last it spreads over City, Town and Country. This Thing, whoever thou art that is guilty herein, proves very injurious to thy Neighbour, therefore I earnestly warn all to watch against this growing Evil, for mark you, in more publick Accusations the Person grieved may have Remedies to clear himself, and detect his Adversary: But here against the Whisperer there is no Possibility of that, because the Whisperer and Backbiter smite in the Dark, and we know not who it is, till at length his Whispers break out. Ah! the Tongue is a little Member, but doth much Mischief, and is used oftentimes as a Sword that wounds the Reputation of innocent Persons by false Reports, *Solomon* speaks of it in *Proverbs* [xviii. a Whisperer separates chief Friends,

2dly, I beg of you 'to watch against the Whisperer and false Reporter, as neither to give Way to or be an Encourager of those that
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come with Slanders, for they that entertain them give Encouragement to them that practise it; We have a Proverb in *England*, That if there were no Receivers there would be no Thieves: So if there were none that would give an Ear to Tales there would be no Tale-bearers; if we are subject to give too easy Credit to them, this encourages the Whisperer and Backbiter, and so begets an ill Opinion of the Person, which is a great Evil to believe Ill without a just Ground: When the Enemy hath thus far gained his End upon any to receive the Accusation, then the next thing is to report it to others, and so become a companion with the Whisperer and Backbiter, and after he hath unjustly withdrawn thy own good Opinion of thy Neighbour, endeavourest to rob him of that with others also; for he that can take Delight to hear his Neighbour reproached may well be presumed to give us to believe, will not stick to spread the Slander.

Therefore Friends, take my Christian Advice to keep in Innocency in this Matter, and not in the least to encourage any that are given to false Reports, or the spreading things to the prejudice of others, by which the sweet Conversation and Unity comes to be broken.

3dly. This Sin of Whispering, Backbiting and false Reports, is a mischievous Enemy that lessens, if not wholly destroys the Credit of Man, not only in spiritual Things but natural, 1st. Consider the Thing he is robbed of. 2dly. The Difficulty of making Satisfaction

tion; a good Name is better than Riches, a Thing to be accounted in great Esteem to every innocent Man, very near to a Man's Life: Now the making of Reparation for the Injury done in this Case of Defamation is very hard, nay, it seems almost impossible, for mind you, when Men are possessed with an ill Opinion of a Man, it is no easy Matter to remove it out of their Minds: Therefore these Things being considered, how wary, how careful, and how conscientious should we be in this Matter, how we speak of, or give Entertainment, to such as are Tale-bearers, Whisperers and false Reporters, that do such great Mischiefs to Men.

4thly. In your common Conversation or visiting one another, keep out of these Reports and rather let it be in the Love of God, stirring up one another to Love, and Charity, and good Works, according to the Gift that is in you, that your Visits may be in the edifying and building up one another in the most Holy Faith, telling one another of your Experiences, and what the Lord hath done for your Souls, who is watering daily his pleasant Plants, and causing them to grow as fruitful Plants, to the Praise of the good Husbandman; and here as we are opened one to another we shall be kept fresh, and green, and tender in the Love of God, here none will be hurt, but rather if any are gone out of the Way or have slipt, to restore such with the Spirit of Meekness and Tenderneſs, this will be.

be far from loading any with Scorn and Calumny, or reviving past offences, and is not according to the Wisdom and Mercy of God, for it doth but drive farther from him, and from Unity with the Brethren: Read. *Ephes. iv. 31, 32. Let all Bitterness, and Wrath, and Anger, and Clamour, and Evil-speaking be put away from amongst you, with all Malice; and be you kind one to another, and tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God for Christ's Sake forgave you.*

5thly. Take not up an Occasion against any from bare report, without certain Testimony or Knowledge of Matter of Fact against the Person, and whoever thou art that reproves another for any Thing that is wrong, had need be innocent in any Conversation, and clear of those Things thou reprovest others for, otherwise it may be said of thee as Christ taught in *Matthew vii. Judge not, lest thou be judged, for with what Judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what Measure ye meet, it shall be measured to you again: And why beholdest thou the Mote that is in thy Brother's Eye, and considerest not the Beam that is in thy own Eye; thou Hypocrite, first cast out the Beam out of thine own Eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the Mote out of thy Brother's Eye.* Most certain it is, without this Rule be observed, thou wilt certainly pull down more than thou canst build up by all the best Words in the World, or the most Pompous Appearance.

6thly. And lastly, I shall give these Directions

tions as the proper Means to stop and prevent the Current of those growing Evils of Strife, Debate, Division, Whispering, Backbiting and false Reports; you know it is the Part of a good Physician not only to shew what the Grief and Distemper is, but to apply such proper Means as may be most suitable for the perfecting the Cure. The Disease is the Subject which this Testimony is against, *viz.* Backbitings and Whisperings: The infallible Cure for it, is our close walking and abiding in Christ who is the peaceable Saviour, and Prince of everlasting Peace; for most certain and without all Controversy, if we keep in the Love and Life that is in him, we shall keep out of all that's evil, and all that offends or otherwise tends to the prejudice of another, for mark you, in Christ Jesus there is neither giving Offence causlessly nor taking Offence, but a Dwelling in Love that is the fulfilling of the Law. 2dly. Put on Charity, it is the Bond of Perfectness, and hath these several Effects: It will certainly keep the Mind in a peaceable and meek Temper, so far from seeking Occasion of Contention that no Provocation shall draw us to it; Charity is not easily provoked, so that whosoever is uncharitable shews his Heart so far from a Christian Temper; and it is to be considered the Nature of this Charity is such, that it will most certainly cause a tender Compassion towards all the Miseries of others that have erred or gone out of the Way, to lend a Hand to restore them back again. To

To close up this my Friendly Persuasion, I commend you to read weightily, and practise sincerely, these Directions of Christ and the Apostle *Paul* gives in this Case of Charity one towards another, which if truly observed will put an End to these Controversies amongst Professors of Christianity, *Mat. xviii. 15. If thy Brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his Fault between thee and him; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy Brother* *Rom. xiv. 1. Him that is weak in the Faith receive you, but not to doubtful Disputations.* *Rom. xiv. 19. Let us follow after the Things that make for Peace, and Things wherewith you may edify one another.* Now the God of Peace that brought again our Lord Jesus from the Dead, that great Shepherd of the Sheep, thro' the Blood of the everlasting Covenant, make you perfect in every good Work to do his Will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his Sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be Glory for ever, *Amen.*

*By one that wishes well to Sion, and that
she may abundantly prosper,*



JOHN HEYWOOD.